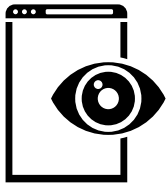


# 2026 Budget Guidelines Survey

## – What We Heard Report



116 Survey  
Submissions



144 Page Visitors



Advertised in the  
Fernie Free Press  
and posted on  
Let's Talk,  
Fernie.ca, and  
Facebook.

The Budget Guidelines Survey was open from October 23 – November 3 on the City's Let's Talk Budget 2026 project page.

The City received **116 responses** to the Budget Guidelines Survey, which asked residents to share their priorities and comfort levels with different budget approaches.

Nearly all of the respondents were homeowners (104) and all but 2 reside within the City of Fernie.

### Response Overview

Most respondents (40%) said their top priority is maintaining reliable services while planning responsibly for the future, followed closely by investing more in infrastructure and community improvements even if that meant higher taxes or fees (38%). About 20% prioritized keeping property taxes as low as possible.

#### Comfort with inflationary increases:

A majority (53%) said they are at least somewhat comfortable with modest tax and fee increases to maintain current service levels, while 34% felt uncomfortable

#### Balancing the budget:

If the City did not increase taxes, 46% preferred reducing some services, while about 32% preferred using reserves temporarily and 8% supported deferring infrastructure projects.

#### Potential service reductions:

When asked which services they would be most comfortable seeing reduced, nearly one in five respondents (22%) said they were not comfortable with any reductions.

Among those open to adjustments, the most frequently selected areas were public events and community programming (47%) and administrative services or customer service response times (45%). Some respondents also selected parks and recreation programs or facilities (28%), planning and development services (16%), and protective services (16%). Only a small number (7%) chose road maintenance or snow clearing frequency.

### **Managing Growth:**

Two-thirds (67%) supported “funding growth with growth” — using new development revenues and updated fees to support staff and systems needed to manage increased demand.

When asked how the City should respond if growth-related revenues are not enough to offset increased service demands, responses were mixed. The most common approach supported was to gradually increase taxes to maintain service levels (36%), limiting service levels until additional funding is available (30%), and reallocating funding from other programs or services (24%).

### **Building reserves for the future:**

A majority of respondents (68%) supported gradually increasing reserve contributions using a mix of new revenues and small tax increases to reduce future risks and debt.

### **Community organization funding:**

When provided with the 2025 operational funding to community organizations, most respondents (52%) supported reducing funding for some or all community organizations, with 27% preferring maintaining current funding, and 15% favouring increases.

## **Open-ended Questions – Key Themes**

80 respondents provided further written feedback. It can be loosely themed as follows:



### **Prioritize Core Infrastructure and Services**

Residents want essential services maintained and upgraded first. New projects like the fire hall are supported, but discretionary spending should not compromise basic infrastructure.

### **Sustainable Revenue and Taxation**

Concerns about high property taxes and affordability are common. Suggestions include higher fees on developers, second homes, or luxury properties, and using growth-related revenues strategically for infrastructure and reserves rather than broad tax increases.

### **Growth and Development Management**

Feedback emphasizes balancing development with current residents' needs, ensuring new growth pays for itself, protecting Fernie's natural spaces, and that there is consideration of climate.

### **Fiscal Responsibility and Efficiency**

Some feel City Hall is top-heavy and urge reducing administrative costs, improving operational efficiency, and reallocating funds from non-essential programs to priority services

### **Community and Recreation Priorities**

Residents value libraries, recreational facilities, and public spaces, but some recommend temporary reductions in arts, events, or tourism-focused programs to focus on infrastructure and essential services.

### **Transparency and Accountability**

People want clearer reporting on spending, public input in major decisions, and accountability for City Hall leadership.

